



STAFF REPORT

Preliminary Design Review for 600 Clipper Drive Proposed Conceptual Development Plan Amendment - PA No. 2004-0074

Honorable Mayor and Council Members

The City has received a Preliminary Design Review application for the 8.6-acre property at 600 Clipper Drive. The site is currently developed with an office building of 156,000 square feet that had most recently been occupied by Asera and Oral-B. The proposal is to demolish the office building and redevelop the site with a low-rise, medium density residential project. Since the project would involve an amendment to the PD zone / Conceptual Development Plan, the Council will conduct the preliminary review.

Preliminary Design Review provides an opportunity for early identification of issues and alternatives that should be considered by the applicant before submitting a formal development review plan for the project. Preliminary design review is not intended to require the Council to provide specific direction regarding an application since the Council may not be reviewing final plans and has not received public comment.

Preliminary Design Review involves minimal staff review: Staff does not check plans for completeness, analyze compliance with zoning standards, or examine environmental impacts. Comments and suggestions made during Preliminary Design Review are completely non-binding on the City Council. Staff will work with the applicant to incorporate and address all Council comments in future submittals.

Project Description

The applicant is proposing to raze all existing buildings and other improvements. A change of use from commercial office to residential would be introduced to the site, and the applicant proposes 151 town-house units, which would represent a density of 18.4 units per acre. The units would likely be no greater than two stories, and organized in blocks of between two and seven units each. A new street and pedestrian access system would be constructed, and an open space area and hiking path are shown along the eastern edge of the property, abutting the slough.

The size and configuration of the individual units is not known.

500-FOOT RADIUS MAP

Vehicular access to the site will be from Island Parkway. Surrounding uses are the slough and

vacant land to the west, the Belmont Sport Complex to the south, Summerfield Suites to the southeast medium density residential (Farallon complex) to the east, and the slough and single family residential (Foster City) to the north.

The General Plan designation for the site is Mixed Use and the zone is PD – Planned Development. The Mixed Use land use designation has no maximum residential density called out (see attached excerpt). Any use, development standard or improvement approved by the Council as part of a Conceptual Development Plan is permitted in the PD zone.

Discussion

In evaluating the project at this preliminary stage of the development review process, the City Council has directed that the focus be on three questions:

1. Is the proposed land use appropriate for the site?
2. Is the proposed intensity of land uses appropriate for the site?
3. Is the arrangement or distribution of proposed land uses appropriate for the site?

The first question is the key to this application: Does the Council think that redeveloping the site from office / commercial to residential is appropriate? There is no absolute answer to this question; however, the General Plan policies for Mixed Use indicate both commercial office and housing are appropriate and would fulfill the area's overall goals. Staff believes that conversion of this site to residential would alter the character of the neighborhood – tipping the balance away from commercial to a stronger residential identity. There are a number of perspectives that can be taken regarding this shift: urban design, fiscal impact and traffic are the three most prominent.

Demolishing a multi-story office building will alter the appearance of the area, as viewed from many locations within and outside the City. Replacing it with low-rise residential will remove it as a visual landmark and bring it into uniformity with surrounding suburban development. Fiscally, either project will generate property taxes to the City. The office building has the potential to generate sales taxes and unsecured property taxes, depending on the tenant; however, the City does not control the type of office tenant that might occupy the building to assure such revenue. It is presently vacant. As for traffic, the conversion from commercial office to residential is expected to alter traffic patterns to the site, by reversing the peak hour commute from morning in-bound / evening out-bound to morning out-bound / evening in-bound. As indicated in the applicant's analysis, this has the potential to reduce congestion on local streets from the current use. However, additional investigations will be required to assess actual impacts.

The second question is how much new residential would be appropriate for the site. The applicant's proposal of 151 units represents a density of about 18.5 units per acre. For purposes of comparison, the Farallon project contains a condominium section at 11.7 units per acre and a small-lot single-family development at 9 units per acre. The proposal would be denser than others in the Island Park development.

Finally, the proposed site plan can be described as a clustered town-house arrangement surrounded by local streets and pedestrian walkways. It would be similar in character to the existing Farallon

condominium project. As noted above, the proposed layout would establish a low-rise appearance in contrast to a high-rise residential structure of similar density.

Public Contact

No public contact beyond posting of the agenda was initiated by the City in preparation for Preliminary Design Review. The applicant has received a copy of this report.

Financial Impact

None at this time – the applicant has paid the required application fee (\$1169.00).

Summary

The expressed purpose of Preliminary Design Review is to, “inform the decision makers about the project and its general features...” Council members are under no obligation to provide comment; however, your views may be helpful to the applicant in preparing a formal application. Staff recommends that any comments offered by the Council be directed only at the three issues raised in this memo: change of use, density and layout.

Attachments:

1. Belmont General Plan, Sections 2056-2060 (Mixed Use Development)
2. Letter from Grosvenor USA Limited, w/ exhibits

Respectfully submitted,

Craig A. Ewing
Planning and Community Dev’t Dir., AICP

Daniel Rich
Interim City Manager